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# Leaders plan surgical strikes at Sandinista military targets

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Nicaraguan resistance leaders expect to move their forces by early spring from Honduras to Nicaragua to begin a new campaign of attacks against Sandinista military targets.

U.S. officials estimate that from 8,000 to 10,000 anti-Marxist rebels would move into Nicaragua from Honduras, joining about 5,000 rebels already there.

The campaign is part of a strategy by the rebel leaders to win more support among the Nicaraguan people and to demonstrate to the world — and particularly skeptical politicians in the United States — that the

resistance forces can make military headway against the Soviet-backed Sandinista regime.

Moving the rebel forces into Nicaragua also would please the Honduran government, which helped the rebels, known as Contras, fight off an offensive by Sandinista forces on Honduran soil this week, the officials said.

The move, and weapons for the strikes, would be funded by the \$100-million package that is being distributed in three stages to the resistance, the officials said.

The campaign of carefully targeted strikes against military

convoys, fuel depots and other logistical support are designed to avoid civilian casualties, resistance officials say. The rebels intend to show the Nicaraguan people that the resistance forces are enemies of the Marxist government but not of civilians who live in government-run farm cooperatives or towns — targets of some resistance offensives in the past.

The strikes also would be more effective than conventional fighting, they say. The Sandinistas' Soviet-supplied HIND helicopter gunships make it nearly impossible for the rebels to hold territory, said Aristides Sanchez, a leader of the Nicaraguan Democratic Front, the military arm of the resistance.

The strikes against the Sandinista military are one element in a two-

part strategy to gain political support among the Nicaraguan people.

The other key element is a rebel-operated, 50,000-watt radio station, which by month's end is expected to be broadcasting the resistance forces' political message throughout the nation.

U.S. and rebel officials hope the clandestine radio station, to be known as Radio Liberacion, will build a reputation for news reporting and become an alternative voice to the state-run media.

"The radio station is crucial in delivering the message and breaking the wall of Sandinista propaganda within the country," said Robert Kagan, deputy for policy for the State Department's bureau of inter-American affairs.

Rebel military successes are vital this year as the Reagan administration tries to shore up the congressional support it has slowly rebuilt since the cutoff of aid to the resistance following the CIA covert mining of Nicaraguan harbors in 1984.

Because of the Iran-Contra arms scandal and Democratic control of the Senate, congressional headcounters on both sides of the aisle say that chances for approval of new aid to the rebels are too close to call.

Officials say current preliminary counts in the Senate range from 51-49 for the aid to Democratic counts of 51-49 against it.

Much of the \$40 million in aid that has been released to the rebels from the U.S. government has gone to civilian supply stations in Honduras

for resistance forces to prepare for the move into Nicaragua and the attacks, officials said.

Another \$20 million of the \$100 million is expected to be released within a week, and the final \$40 million in February.

Some Capitol Hill Democratic sources say they expect a congressional fight over the release of the last \$40 million, but Elliott Abrams,

assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs, says he doesn't expect opponents will be able to block the funds.

To win a veto fight with President Reagan over discontinuing the disage, opponents of rebel aid would have to muster a two-thirds vote.

Mr. Abrams also believes Congress will vote more aid to the resistance. He said many Democrats in leadership positions in the Senate — such as Sen. Sam Nunn, expected to become the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee — have not changed their support since the arms scandal surfaced.

"We are confident that Congress will judge this program on the basis of how well the resistance performs politically and militarily over the next six to eight months," Mr. Kagan said.

Resistance leaders have said they

were unaware any proceeds from the sale of weapons to Iran were funneled to them. Intelligence and State Department sources have said the rebels seemed hard pressed for staples — even food — at the time when millions of dollars were alleged to have been diverted from the arms sale to the resistance.

Ernesto Palazio, a Washington-based spokesman for the rebels, said the scandal is uniting rebel leaders "because we have a harder fight ahead in Congress."

"We must explain to the American people that the Nicaraguan issue should be judged on its own merits," Mr. Palazio said. "It will open up the debate on Central America once again, and that is not a bad thing at all. On the contrary, it's a positive thing."

"It is important that the American people realize that whatever the investigations show, there is still the same problem down there — a Soviet-backed government is consolidating itself, and it isn't to the advantage of the United States to see that government consolidate itself."

"Congress should investigate possible violations by the administration, but Congress should not be emotional. It should be cool-headed about this," Mr. Palazio said.